

## **Here I am**

**Michael Gwaba, Zambia**

My name is Michael Gwaba and I'm 41 years old. In 1998 working in Human Resources at a local Zambian company I was asked to terminate a colleague's employment contract who was under suspicion by the company owners of having AIDS. She lost her job and I was consumed with guilt at not having been able to defend her.

In 1999 I lost my fiancée and son within 6 months of each other to AIDS-related illnesses. I began to lose weight from kaposi sarcoma I learned to be an AIDS-related illness and without surprise I also lost my job. With no free treatment available in Zambia at that time by the time many people got tested they were very sick which helped promote the idea that once you got tested you die. In 2000, my sister finally convinced me to take the test in a private hospital. Testing positive my CD4 count was 41 I was sure I was going to die. I began treatment on Trimune 40, and the kaposi sarcoma was treated with chemotherapy.

My health finally began to return but at great financial cost that I would not have been able to sustain had I not found access to free treatment from a government hospital in Chelston. I found others like me there and we formed a support group for PLHIV which gave us both emotional and psychosocial support.

Global Fund has helped in so many ways. In the beginning, some members of support groups within Lusaka were trained in Project Proposal writing through the Global Fund, which allowed us to find a way to funding for our own support groups from Zambia National AIDS Network (ZAN) who are a principle recipient of the Global Fund.

I was also recruited by a trainer to help produce a 'Positive Living Handbook' for persons living with HIV/AIDS, and to help with posters about ARVs. I was empowered with a salary given to me by an organization that was accessing party of its funding from the Global Fund.

I know how important the Global Fund is. My health has improved from having access to the life supporting ARVs My CD4 count is 780 and I am now an equal partner in an organisation that run solely by people living with HIV/AIDS with funding from the Global Fund through ZAN. My life allows me to help so many others' lives. We use our funding to provide nutritional support to people living with HIV/AIDS co-infected with TB, we train adherence counsellors for HIV/AIDS in the communities where we work to provide adherence support to those who have challenges with adherence to treatment and medication, and train DOTS TB treatment supporters who go out into the community and monitor patients who just start taking TB treatment. We give people the means to go out and reach other people with information about health and this has only been made possible with funding from the Global Fund.

Without the Global Fund all that I have worked for will be taken away. The inevitable resulting lack of treatment would very likely mean I would be dead within a year, along with thousands of others living with HIV around the world. We all have our place, please remember us. Please remember me. Here I am.

*Source : [http://www.hereiamcampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Michael-Gwaba\\_EN.pdf](http://www.hereiamcampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Michael-Gwaba_EN.pdf)*